

U.S. SAYS MOSCOW REFUSED A LETTER FROM PRESIDENT

PRIVATE ENVOY REBUFFED

Scowcroft, Carrying Reagan's Note, Wasn't Given Chance to See Soviet Leaders

By LESLIE H. GELB

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 23 — A private American envoy carrying a personal message from President Reagan to Konstantin U. Chernenko in Moscow was not given the opportunity to meet with the Soviet leader or any other top Soviet official, according to Administration officials.

The officials said the envoy, Lieut. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, retired, the chairman of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces, made known to Soviet officials when he was in Moscow two weeks ago that he had a personal Presidential letter and some additional authorized comments, but never heard anything back and was never given an explanation.

U.S. Elections Seen as Factor

In Moscow, Western diplomats who have talked with Soviet officials say they believe the Soviet Union is likely to remain cool for some time to American overtures because of uncertainty over the American elections and other factors. But President François Mitterrand, ending two days of talks in Washington, said he believed Moscow may be reassessing its position on arms control talks, and he warned against "creating new causes of dissension" in East-West relations. [Page 3.]

American administrations have on several occasions used private go-betweens known to be respected in Moscow to deliver high-level messages to Soviet leaders at times of difficulty in formal Soviet-American relations. Administration officials said they could not recollect any previous instance of Soviet officials' refusing to receive an envoy and a message at appropriate levels.

Administration officials read this as another sign that top Soviet leaders are either unwilling or unable to agree on restarting nuclear arms talks or any

Moscow Refuses a Message From President

visible negotiating contacts unless Washington first makes concrete gestures or concessions.

On Thursday, Arthur A. Hartman, the United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union, said in Washington that the two countries were involved in talks that "could lead to some kind of progress on the more serious issues."

He added that he hoped for a resumption of talks on a cultural and scientific exchange accord that expired in 1980.

The message taken to Moscow by Mr. Scowcroft, according to the sources, was that Mr. Reagan was prepared for serious and wide-ranging talks and accommodations with the Soviet Union, including suggestions on the stalled nuclear arms talks, if Soviet negotiators would return to the bargaining table.

Responses 'Pretty Frosty'

This was said to be identical to other Presidential messages in recent weeks, starting with Vice President Bush's meeting with Mr. Chernenko a month ago at the time of Yuri V. Andropov's funeral. At least two other letters were said to have been exchanged by the leaders since then.

A high State Department official said, "Essentially, we've been telling them that we're serious and ready to engage, and their responses have all been pretty frosty."

Soviet officials were said to have told Mr. Scowcroft and American diplomats that they viewed these enticements as a trick to lure Moscow back into negotiations in order to convince the American public and world leaders that a serious dialogue is under way, and thus help Mr. Reagan's re-election prospects without advancing the negotiations. They have called for American deeds, not just words, and in particular some commitment to eliminate the medium-range American missiles recently deployed in Europe.

Mr. Scowcroft went to Moscow for four days as a member of a private group of American foreign policy experts to engage in informal talks with Soviet officials. Known as the Dartmouth Group, it has, with varying membership, met with Soviet arms control experts yearly for almost two decades. Mr. Scowcroft was out of the country and unavailable for comment, but other participants characterized the exchanges as the most negative ever.

The sources also said Gen. David C. Jones, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and another mem-

ber of the group, asked to meet with top Soviet generals and was refused.

Administration officials said Hans-Jochen Vogel and Egon Bahr, two leaders of the West German Social Democratic Party and established advocates of improving East-West relations, were in Moscow at the same time as the Dartmouth Group and were received by Mr. Chernenko. But, the officials said what Mr. Chernenko said to them was no more promising than what was told to the Dartmouth Group.

3 Theories on Soviet Position

There are three competing theories in the Administration to explain the hard-line Soviet position.

One is that Soviet leaders are in agreement about rejecting any activity that might help Mr. Reagan's re-election prospects and believe his Administration's bargaining position would not be much different in a second term than it is now. Accordingly, there is not much incentive to restart talks now.

The second is that a leadership struggle is under way in Moscow, with some wanting to resume the dialogue and others opposed, and as a result they cannot agree on doing anything new.

The third is that Moscow means what it says, that if Washington made concessions first, it would go back to the Geneva arms control talks, which have been suspended since December.

Continued on Page 3, Column 1